tower

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TOWER

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Midnight

By Frances Brewer

IN THE gray quietness of the funeral parlor the only sound to be heard, save the soft purring of Midnight, is the steady scrape of Sue's pen as she sits at the secretary busily writing a letter. The blazing redness of the fire in the stone fireplace seems to radiate through the room. It penetrates every corner as though trying to protect it from some unseen enemy lurking beyond its four walls.

Stretching his small trousered legs a little further in front of the fire Charles shifts to a more comfortable position in which he can see the face of Miss Ila, his nurse, who, with hands propped on her lean knees, is staring at faraway images taking form in the flickering flames.

From Miss Ila's sharp-featured face accentuated by her icy gray hair drawn tightly back and wound in a ball at the nape of her neck, his eyes wander over the familiar room. There is the grandfather clock with its swinging pendulum that has never been still as long as he can remember. His daddy's comfortable arm chair drawn up close in front of the radio, its sagging springs showing beneath the bottom of the chair. Opposite his daddy's chair is his mother's maple rocker that she sits in when she darns his socks and takes up hems in his sister Sue's party dresses. Just beyond is the piano which was given to Sue on her seventh birthday by Mother and Daddy who have gone to take Mrs. Bermerton's body home and left him all alone with Sue and Miss Ila.

"Miss Ila, Miss Ila!" Charles gasped in a small frightened voice as the room seemed to grow darker.

"What in the world's wrong with you, child?" snaps Miss Ila, roused from her deep thought. "Sue only turned off the desk lamp. We have enough light from the fires."

"Oh," he sheepishly replies, glancing over at Sue who is smiling at him with that "special smile" she has for little boys. Still smiling she carefully removes her glasses, pushing her long black hair back from her face as she extends her stockinged legs toward the warm glow of the fire.

Feeling Midnight's soft body move beside him he releases his hold on her as she lazily gets to her feet, arching her back, stretching one furry leg, then the other. Licking her tongue out at him in a teasing fashion she turns, and waving her fluffy white tail, saunters out into the dark hall beyond the living room, looking back over her shoulder at him as if to say, "come on".

Lying very still, Charles strains his ears to hear the sound of Midnight's padded steps, wondering what she is doing out in the hall. "Charles, if you don't stop looking like that, your eyes are going to pop right out of your head."

"But Miss Ila, isn't Midnight afraid out there in the dark by herself?"

"No, Charles," replied Sue. "Cats see in the dark when people can't."

"Why?"

"Well . . . er . . . er," hesitates Sue, to be interrupted by Miss Ila's irritated "Maybe you better ask Midnight."

Suddenly feeling very brave, Charles cautiously tiptoes to the door and not seeing Midnight, steps out into the dark hall beyond. The wavering light from the living room makes weird, distorted shadows on the floor, sending cold shivers up his back as he feels his way to the stairs.

"Kitty, kitty," he calls as he reaches the door to the casket display room. "Somebody left this door open. I ain't supposed to go in but—"

"Meow, meow."

Pushing the door open a little wider he peeks wide-eyed inside, but no cat is to be seen. Swallowing the lump which keeps welling up in his throat, he quietly pushes the door open a little further, stepping inside the room, haunted by the feeling that someone is watching him from one of the caskets or outside one of the uncurtained windows.

Straining his eyes to acquaint himself with the darkness around him, he feels his way over to the window, stopping at every step to listen for sounds coming from the dark corners of the room. Nothing can be heard except the loud thumping of his own heart and his heavy frightened breathing.

Finally able to separate one dark object from another, he slips from his place beside the window. Getting down on his chubby knees he begins crawling around under the caskets, careful to keep his head low so

as not to hit one.

"Midnight, Midnight!"

"Meow, meow," comes from a distant corner of the room.

"Midnight, let's go back to the fire. I don't like it in here. Midnight, don't go in there. I can't reach the light switch," he beseechingly calls as Midnight's white body makes a dart for the open door. Still creeping on hands and knees, he maneuvers his way among the caskets, all the while praying in his small mind, "Dear God, please don't let her go in there with all those dead people, make her come back."

Scarcely able to stick his head inside the door for looking at all the shadows behind him, he finally finds courage to crack the door just enough to see into the room. Peering up from his position on the tile floor, the white instrument cases along the wall seem to be daring him to enter their sanctuary. Just one more step and the glass doors will fly open, letting all the sharp knives and scissors he has seen Daddy use so often fall out on him.

"Mid . . . Midnight, where are you? Come on, nice kitty, let's go in the kitchen and Charles will give you a nice bowl of milk."

Unable to see the lurid outline of the whole room he unwillingly crawls inside the door. The wavering elm branches between the street light and the windows cause the shadows to play a ghostly game of hide and seek over the sheeted operating tables, the black and white tiled floor and the mirrored cases around the room.

Drawing his knees up under him he sits back on them, his terrified eyes following the splotches of light as they fall on the glass doored instrument cases, daddy's chair and cluttered-up desk top, the stool where Daddy had been working, and finally the white sheeted operating tables arranged in the center of the room. From each sheet protrudes the form of a human body lying in a frigid position.

The still silence of the room is broken suddenly by a resounding click as the door glides to, the lock sliding smoothly into place.

"Midnight," softly at first, then in a hoarse scream, "Midnight, let's go! Please come on. Well, you can just stay then, but I'm going back to the living room with Sue and Miss Ila." Grabbing the door with a hasty jerk, his small body is slung against it as he tugs and pulls to open it.

"Midnight, we . . . we're locked in here. I'm awful scared. Midnight, get down off that table. That's Mr. Jordan, and you know he don't like cats. Come down from there."

Shakily, Charles gets to his knees, and catching hold of the operating table, pulls up on his feet to find himself staring into the wide-eyed expressionless face of Mrs. Brown.

"Miss Ila! Sue!" he screams, not able to move his light tennis shoes which seem to be glued to the floor, just standing there horrified, looking into the cold frigid eyes and the colorless face silhouetted by a halo of pitch-black hair.

Depth of the Sea

By Barbara Richards

The deep blackness of the water arose before me
As I braced myself against the rail with my knee.
From this depth something unknown sang,
And I felt the seriousness of life as it rang
With the fierceness of a bell long silent.

The light from the full moon
Could never pierce this depth of darkness.
Even though each man sings a common tune
His thoughts lie forever in a gray mist—
Never to be conquered, but hidden in darkness.

The bell calls for a sounding sea
But I'm braced against the rail with my knee.
I can still hear those haunting screams
As they whisper of lost dreams.

While still a prisoner in its chains
The lost, the winds, and the rains.
I can laugh at man's futile works
Where the hair-pin thinness of anger ever lurks.

Elegy To Grandfather

By Patricia Mayher

The redbud tree is in bloom and winter is the
Cruelest of them all. For you are dead — and
Pregnant sprouts break the cold ground—
The redbud — it is your color. The wistaria
Too—its drooping purple fading like your eyes.
I clutch madly—blindly in the reeling mist
That chokes my soul. My legs are cold
Up to the knees—the warmth left only holds a
Last faint breath that screams — my God . . . it's Spring—
And the house isn't even painted!
I cringe in the corner while life and death
Dance wildly in the streets — a wager for my soul.
And the Smiths keep adding extra rooms.
There is always a cry from the nursery and the
Green sprouts shoot up and grate like sharp-tempered
Knives against each other—turning white hot
And melting . . . I put my heart in the redbud tree and my
Head in the branches as the ice-cream man rang the little
Bell and the neighborhood kids came running with
Sweaty nickels — your bony hand reached for my
Red tear . . . and molded it a heart — and
You shall have my bastards like water gushing from the
Pump house! But the wistaria keeps fading and
It's Spring! And the bat in the pump house keeps thudding his
Brains against the wall, as the rats go tumbling into
The milk cans.

The Sun On The Snow

By Norma Jean Deck

YOU COULD not tell whether he was twenty or thirty. He was a tall man, thin and lanky, and his shoulders were hunched. He was pale, and his eyes were set deep behind fringes of purplish blue. They were not blue, nor green, nor gray, but a mixture of them all, and they had a color all their own. And they made you think of velvet and soft, limp, dewy things. When you glanced at them you had to look back again and it was hard to look away. They made you lose yourself, in what, you did not know, but there was something there that made you feel complete, whole, as if in them were the answers to all those questions and doubts that tortured you. They were so cool, so calm, so dark, so knowing, so sad.

And when he played the piano with his big, clumsy hands, they were not clumsy any more, and they were not ugly, but beautiful beyond all beauties because they played life. They played all her conflicts, all her dreams, all her loneliness, all that intense happiness that only the lonely can know. And that was life. Each note struck a vibrant chord in her soul and with each chord their spirits met; and in the pit of her stomach and in the fiery and heavy lead in her heart a cry of painful joy leapt up unheard.

He lived alone at the foot of the hill in the marshy land near the river in a little log cabin, down where the weeping willows and the tall canes grow, and at night as she sat in the tower, his music pushed its way fervently up the hill, through her window, and into her.

She had seen him three times since he had moved there four months ago, once at the community store down the road and twice at the concerts he had given in town; and she had read in the paper that some of his music had been published. And then one winter day she was walking through the woods. A gray toboggan was pulled down over her short, red, straight hair. The sun shining on the snow made her green eyes bright, and even greener; her short, slight and boyish figure was hidden

in loose, large coveralls, and her small feet were clad in boots much too large for her. A gun rested on her shoulder.

She heard the crunching of his steps in the snow, but because of the thick growth of trees and canes, she did not see him until they were face to face. She stopped abruptly and said in an automatic and toneless voice, "Good morning." He looked at her kindly. He was not surprised, and he smiled at her. He did not look questioningly at her when she felt her face drain pale. So he must know who she was. He must already know that she was that peculiar and scared little girl who lived in that old colonial house on the hill with her grandmother whom nobody ever saw and everybody said was crazy and her father who drank whiskey and quoted Shakespeare and wrote books that were never published. Yes, he must know. His gaze did not waver, and he smiled as he tilted his gun across his shoulder and said, "I see someone else thought it a good day to go hunting. Are there many quail in these swamps? or doves? What do you hunt mostly?"

The sweat in her arm pits felt like ice water as it trickled down her arms. She looked at the snow at her feet. He was not like the others, so alien and so far away. He did not giggle and laugh and babble like the boys and girls at school in town; there was something of her in him. It was in his music. And she had known—she had so hoped it would be different with him. But it was worse. With the others she could pretend and they might never see the fear that gnawed at her. It was easy to fool some of them.

She jerked her head back and raised her bright eyes defiantly and in a loud quick and guarded voice she began, "Quail—if you can find 'em—there's a few doves too." The last words trailed off into silence. His face, his eyes, she saw there so much of what she had known. It was all written there so plainly and so painfully. She felt herself strangely enshrouded, protected. She was drawn out of herself into a world she had never known. The world behind her and beyond her was dissolved, and her soul melted in surrender, in yearning, in sadness, in joy, and she felt something within her rush out to meet him, and she knew when their spirits met and clasped. And they stood there in the snow, in silence, staring into each others' eyes.

The far-off barking of her dogs reached her ears, but gradually she

realized they were not in the distance but very near her and their bark was loud and urgent. Her head dropped to her breast; he moved toward her and took her hand and said, "Kathie".

A tear rolled down her cheek and dropped on his hand and she turned and ran frighteningly back up the hill.

Light Comes

By Jean Grady

The September dusk was a hot mass of quiet.
Blistering, silent winds dusted the earth.
It was flat, black and scorched,
Darkness was sifting over the land.

The sand dunes lay folded and waiting.
The wind rested, a spirit of tenseness lay over the desert.
Then the wind regained its rushing strength and charged.
Shafts of blinding, stinging sand hit the cacti.

All night the elements battled,
The wind shoved and sifted the sand.
Heat pressed the earth like a red-hot iron.
The Eucalyptus were ground, bitten and stamped.

But, then, all subsided, and the breath of dawn caressed the east.
Pastel mists of light pointed to the sun's approach.
A soft and comforting light was coming,
After the blackest night, morning light always comes.

Old Man In A Hurry

By Frances Echols

THE OLD, bent-over Negro man stopped short in the middle of the red mud road and leaning heavily on his hickory cane, he shook a menacing black finger at the thin little boy with the snaggled grin walking by his side.

"Three months ain't half sech a long time as you'd think it wuz when yore is lying up in de horsepital wid nary a thing to busy yore hans wid. Lak ah've done tole you time an time before, Mistuh Stevie, you jest better enjoy yoreself whiles you is young and sound o' body cuz you nevah know whut's gonna happen."

Tossing up a dirt clod at each step, Stephen wasn't paying much attention to Will's philosophy; he was used to hearing such advice from him. And, besides, he was much too excited about Will's coming home and he had lots of stuff to ask Will before they got to the house where he knew he wouldn't be able to get a word in edge-wise.

His frank brown eyes stared at his aging, dark friend. He couldn't get over how different Will looked with his go-to-meetin' clothes on—a short, black coat, his burial outfit he had said once, clean overalls with iron creases, and a tall hat. Why he'd hardly known who it was when he first saw Will coming up over the hill a little while ago. If it hadn't been for the way he walked—he had a kinda duck-walk, slew-footed like—and the way he hurried so. There wasn't another Negro within twenty miles who even tried to get anywhere in a hurry.

"Yore Paw writ me bout yore bein' mad cause ah sent dem some of dose post cards an din' send you one. Ah wrote one to yore Paw, one to yore Maw, an one to Mistuh Nick, at de sto. Ah'm glad one got heah fer you, too, Mistuh Stevie. I'se intendin' to write you one all de time."

Stephen stopped hopping on one foot, dropped his handful of rocks, and stared at the old man's sunken cheeks and smiling mouth. For once he even forgot to feel big when Will called him "Mistuh Stevie."

"Will, you don't have any teeth anymore! Did they pull 'em out?

All out at one time? Daddy'll only pull one of mine at a time and then just if its real loose."

"Yessuh! Dey done pulled 'em ev'ry one. Sho is a heap o' trouble to eat, but ah feels heaps better."

Stevie whistled shrilly through the gap where his own two front teeth had been, and gazed admiringly at the chuckling Negro.

Will's quick black eyes caught sight of a garden row of fresh green leaves near the road and he said:

"Ah sho will be glad when dose ernyuns done got bout a foot tall. Dose am de onliest vegibles dat ah laks fer my breakfuss."

He bent down slowly—he was still pretty weak—to inspect the small plants and, since he hadn't changed much, decided as usual that whoever did that planting didn't know much about his job.

He straightened and reached up with one gnarled black hand and took off his hat, exposing to the hot, midday sun his grizzled white-streaked hair so precisely plastered in a wavy circle. He wiped the sweat from his forehead and walked the few short steps to the barbed-wire cattle gap. He looked closely at a reddish-brown, half-grown cow that stood munching near an empty feed trough. He took a couple of exaggerated steps backwards and turned toward Stephen, who had been following him right along.

"Sho nuff, now, Mistuh Stevie. Dat can' be yore little 4-H'er, can it? Well, as ah live and breathe, she done sho growed. An ah wish you'd look at dose twins dere, Cleopatra and Sally. Dey still sticks closer to each otha dan dey do to dey maws. Sho is odd how dey come to look jest alack."

At the sound of the deep, resonant voice the two identical calves skitted away kicking like sixty with legs just discovered.

Stephen heard the porch door slam up at the big house and his mother called out to him.

"Stevie! Who is that you're talking to down there? Is that Will come home again? If it is, bring him on up here. Your father and I want to see him."

Stevie gave Will a resigned, well-here-goes look and they started for the house. As they stepped up on the back porch, the door opened and his mother rushed out, bringing with her the good, stomach-churning

smells of the kitchen. She was small and round, with dark brown hair and large brown eyes that shone with welcome.

"Will, why didn't you tell us you were coming home? We have really missed you. Come on in the kitchen. Are you feeling well now?"

"Yes'm. Ah've been lots better since dey took out my teeth. Ah'm mighty glad to git home agin. Ah hopes my boy Jesse been takin' care o' things, and that yawl been gittin along all right, Miz Mary."

"We've been worried about you, Will. Elvie and Leebone came down yesterday with some notion of calling you long distance. They said they hadn't heard from you in over two weeks and were worried."

"Well, ah done tole dem chillun dat ah wuz coming home jest as soon as de docs'd let me, and dere wadn't enything ah could do bout it. Ah wuz ready to come but dey tole me dat ha mights well go git back in bed dere at de vetruns horspital cuz ah couldn't leave, but den dey found out dat ah wuz a Mason an dey let me come home for thirty day."

A door slammed and footsteps hurried into the room. Cy Odom's forehead had already receded far back, and his black hair was spotted with white bristles, but his lean, tall body with its limber movements clearly indicated that he still had plenty of vitality. Smiling, he walked over to Will and shook hands with the startled Negro.

"Will, it is certainly fine to have you home again. We've been barely limping along without you. Those confounded cows won't so much as lift their heads when I try to call them, the crows are eating up the corn, and the watermelons Stevie and I planted aren't big as a marble. We really need you. How're you feeling? You look fine now, but you've lost some weight. Didn't they feed you good at that hospital?"

"Mistuh Cy, ah'll jest tell you, we had too much dad blamed meat to eat! We had a mess o' lamb all de time, and ah tells you ah hates it. An de reason why is, de lamb it don't say nuthin when you kill it. Don't scream nor shriek. You'n stick a pitch fork straight in dey heart, an a lamb won't utter a mumbling word. But den, wid all mah teeth out, ah don' reckon it makes much nevermind to me whut's sot on de table."

"Will, what did the doctors say? Are you really well now? And what all did they do to you up there? Just sit down in this chair—that trip was a hardship on you I know—and tell us all about it."

Will hesitated and then under Miz Mary's gentle urging he sat down, but he didn't feel right asettin' and restin' in his white folks big house jest lak he's one of 'em.

"Well, dey give me dis medicine, say to take it three time a day and fore bedtime. An in thirty day ah kin go back up dere an git mah teeth back. Dose doctors an nurses wuz jest lovely to me; dey wuz jest as nice as kin be. An ah ain' nevah even in de army come across eny nicer bunch of men dan de ones dat ah lived wid up at dat vetruns horspital. Me an de rest o' de World I vetruns jest got along fine, even wid dose young whippersnapper World II's. Dere wuz the talkinest World II vetrun—he knowed ev'rything but didn' have no sense atall. Lak ah done heard all mah life, 'A wise head totes a still tongue'."

Though he knew he had a rapt audience, and he thoroughly enjoyed being the center of attention while telling his long-winded stories, Will abruptly changed the subject. He looked over at Stephen, who was busily molding clay men on the floor, but at the same time listening to every word.

"Ah wuz disheartened when yore Paw writ me bout yore little puppy got kilt by one of dem dump trucks. Dat lil runt of a dog of mine'll hafta watch bof dese houses now."

Stephen looked up and merely nodded his head. He didn't want to talk about Penny's getting killed yet. He kept remembering the way he'd found her. She hadn't been home for a day and a half, and as soon as the quick, fierce summer storm had stopped, he'd gone out to find her. He remembered how the wind kept tearing his voice out of his throat. He had stood in the mud by the side of the road, getting splattered when each truck roared past, until finally one of the men had stopped and asked him what he was doing out there by himself. Stephen asked him if he'd seen a brown and white dog who was smart and could run fast, and the man had said no, but he had seen a brown and white dog who couldn't run fast enough. Then he'd jerked his head in the direction of the bottom of the next hill and said, "She's down there. Now move out of my way, sonny, I've got money to make."

When he found her, he just stared at her for what seemed like hours before he half-dragged, half-carried the dead dog home. The sun was drying out blood clots softened by the rain, and gray and yellow in-

sides wormed out of the ears and where the neck was broken. Stephen remembered stooping down and shooing the flies away from the wide-open eyes.

With the startling insight and understanding of his people, Will leaned over and placed a heavy hand on the small, bowed head. "Now, don't you fret bout dat lil dawg, Mist' Stevie. She done had a good life frolickin' round dis farm. An don' you fret a minit bout her bein' unhappy now, cuz ah now she ain'. Now, listen whiles ah tells you whut ah'm gonna do next time yore ear is ahurtin' you. A sho nuff cure for a aching ear is dis: git a betsy bug outa a rotten stump and he got one drop of blood in his whole body an you squez dat one drop in yore ear an yore ear ache done flew de coop."

He stood up unsteadily and picked up his hat from the floor. "Well, ah guess ah better git on over to de house, if yo' don' need me for a while, Mistuh Cy. Dem chillun's jest wild to see me try'n eat some dinner wid mah mouf in de shape it's in."

"Did you get the money I sent in that letter, Will?"

"Yessuh, Mistuh Cy, and ah been meanin' to thank you fer it. Ah got another World I vetrun to read yore letter to me and he said, 'Look heah, Mistuh Will, that white man must think a lot of you.' Ah tole 'im dat de whole passel o' you do, and dat ah gotta hurry an git home cuz yawl wuz all in a worriation bout me.

"An Miz Mary, ah been wonderin' if ah could borry one of yore kitchen tools fer a lil while. Ah don' know whuts you calls it, but ah know whut it looks lak."

"Certainly, Will, I'll lend you whatever you want, but be sure and have Elvie take care of it." Will got up slowly and went over with Miz Mary and peered hard into a large, cluttered kitchen drawer.

Presently the old Negro turned, and with this short farewell, "Ah'll be heah at sun-up tomorry," he left, walking fast and slew-footed, and clutching tightly to a heavy iron meat-grinder.

Fire

By Betty Washington

A smell of burning flesh and wood
Entwines itself around my nostrils,
And the shrill sound of fire engines
And maddening screams
Fill my ears to overflowing.

I find myself drawing near
To a terrorizing mountain of fire
Which engulfs a failing building
And a host of panic-stricken people—

People who were unaware
Of the fate they had in store,
Children innocently sleeping in their beds,
The drunk, the sober, neither doubting
That all would be well throughout the night.

A woman, hanging out of a window,
Clutches her small baby to her,
Praying and screaming for help.

A man lurches from the tenth story
And splashes against the wet concrete.

Men in white hurry to and fro with stretchers
While their lungs fill with smoke.

Hours pass—
And the building, now empty,
Is only a frame of smouldering black brick,
Sending up its burnt offering
Of human beings.

The Road

By Melville Harlin

THE CHOW stood ready to spring, nose with its coal-button and thrust forward, short ears laid back, tail curled tight as a sailor's knot on his back. Too foreign to be considered a beautiful dog; curved and solid like a husky of the far north, he stood there, with the sunlight turning to flame his coat. His amber eyes slanted like those of the Mongolians, the first masters of his breed, and straight red hair stood out above the soft wool coat that had protected his ancestors against the fierce cold of the northern Gobi Desert centuries past.

It was only for a warning moment that he stood and growled. Then with determined effort he pounced on his prey. The assault had only the appearance of ferocity. With his broad chest and heavy-maned shoulders the chow merely shoved the invading mongrel, as if in warning that it was encroaching on his domain, and the invader turned and fled.

Despite the pain in his back, the chow stalked with dignity to the driveway, lay down, and began his morning toilet. Cat-like, he licked his paws, and with them fastidiously washed his face. Then his well-padded paws before him, his huckleberry tongue rhythmically went over and over them, lengthily and deliberately. He then rose, threw the weight of his fifty pounds full on his forefeet, flexed his head backward and his rump upward, and luxuriously stretched. With an effort he righted himself, shook out his coat, curled his tail tightly on his back, and strolled majestically down the driveway.

A whistle from the direction of the house told him that breakfast was waiting. He didn't turn or give any notice of having heard. Deliberately he circled the premises, investigating any change from the previous evening—a piece of paper blown from the street and lodged in a hawthorn bush; the strange smell of a child's lost toy pistol. At length satisfied, he stalked to the back door where a bowl of milk and bread was waiting.

He lowered his bushy red head into the bowl; the tight curve of his fluffy tail relaxed, and back and forth his purple tongue hit the bowl

like a pneumatic drill. In a matter of seconds the bowl was empty, and with his tongue the chow polished it until it glistened. Then wistfully he looked about him.

It was fine to be back home after an interminable stay at the veterinarian's, where he was placed on a table while the vet prodded and pummeled him. He didn't like the sharp pain that shot through him when the vet touched the spot on his back that was always sensitive, and often became so painful he couldn't rise once he lay down. The incessant barking of dogs, the strange smells, the mad rush all annoyed him. But most of all he disliked the way the vet had made Soft Voice cry when he said: "Mrs. Carroll, this animal has an inoperable growth. There's nothing to be done—the dog may live six weeks, or even six months. I'll give you some pills to give him when he's in pain."

The chow now recognized the sound of a familiar car coming in the driveway. When the car stopped he was at the side on which he knew Soft Voice would step out. He waited, and the car did not open. He began protesting this delay in the language of the chow—a commanding whimper with the emphasis of spoken words. It was a long time Soft Voice sat beneath the wheel before she opened the car door. She took no notice of the chow at first, which was strange; then she bent over, and deep blue eyes looked into the amber eyes of the chow. There were two drops of water on her cheek. The chow licked the cheek and tasted salt.

Soft Voice suddenly buried her face in the chow's heavy mane. She smelled of woods violets, and the chow thought excitedly of the woods behind the house where there were field mice and rabbits which he could no longer hunt. Then Soft Voice shuddered, and the chow forgot the field mice and the rabbits. His eyes were worried. Soft Voice murmured against his ear: "We're both done for, Chu, old boy. I saw Dr. Harris this morning. He says there's hope for me, but I know there's none."

She rose and stood looking down at the dog. "We're the same age, you're six and I'm thirty-six. My kind live six years to your kind's one, and for both of us it will soon be over." She turned toward the house.

The chow's fluffy tail barely moved from side to side in reply. This was no time for vigorous tail wagging. He watched her go slowly into

the house. She didn't move swiftly and sure as she had earlier that morning. She walked with obvious effort.

All afternoon Chu waited in happy anticipation for the front door to open and Soft Voice to call gaily, "Let's be off!"

They'd climb Mt. Cheaha by the roadway, and there were all sorts of exciting by-paths to take—down in a ravine to a spring where there'd be a toad to sniff beneath a rock, or up the winding path to the light tower, where he'd chase a rabbit or a chipmunk, and, on rare occasions, flush a covey of quail. Time was, while Soft Voice sat on High Point Rock, the chow ran the length of the ridge charging imaginary lions; then retreating, then again charging while the roar of the lion shook the mountain; then closer and closer, until with a mighty stroke of his paw he forever silenced his victim.

But Soft Voice didn't come out and swing gaily down the driveway that afternoon, nor the next afternoon, nor on any of the afternoons that followed. The chow waited each afternoon until nearly dusk, then slowly walked down the driveway and turned toward Mt. Cheaha alone.

For a while people came to the house as usual, but they were told Mrs. Carroll wasn't seeing anyone that day. After a while no one came, and the chow missed them when they no longer came. Mr. Carroll came home at night as usual, but Soft Voice no longer went out with him in the evening. And there were no more exciting automobile rides with the chow's hind feet gripping the back seat, his paws clinging to the front seat, and his head at the window with the wind in his face and the smell of rich plowed fields in his nostrils, while he, the chow, was swiftly and lightly skimming through space with unbelievable ease and delight. He missed the automobile rides as much as he did the walks on Mt. Cheaha.

But all these delightful occurrences had abruptly ended the morning Soft Voice had said, "We're both done for. . . . "

Yet life went on much as usual. The chow slept with a haunting uneasiness, and his dreams were those of his ancestors that had raced across the frozen ground to make the kill. When he awoke there were duties to attend—the premises to be kept clear of stray dogs and cats that hunted the birds, or occasionally a cow that had escaped its pasture. And there were wonderful companionable times with Mr. Carroll when

he came out in the evening and strolled about the place with the chow at his heels. But Soft Voice no longer joined in these evening strolls.

Then one damp spring evening the chow lay down and dozed. When he awoke the pain in his back pinned him to the ground like a heavy weight of iron. Mr. Carroll came out and whistled. The chow inched forward, slowly crawling until he was at his feet, the red-plumed tail waving back and forth in usual greeting. Mr. Carroll bent down and gently lifted him and carried him into the house. He laid him on a rug, and the chow looked up and grinned his appreciation. Mr. Carroll abruptly turned away.

But Soft Voice left her chair by the window and came and stood before the chow a long time. The red plume waved back and forth conversationally. Then Soft Voice knelt and laid her cool cheek against the chow's short muzzle and murmured: "I need your courage, old boy."

Shadows filled the room and darkness gathered. The chow slept. When he drowsily opened first one eye and then the other, white curtains at the window waved back and forth, and the smell of spring danced tantalizingly about the room. Deliberately the chow began his toilet. Then, face washed, paws attended, he looked toward the bed where Soft Voice had propped herself against the pillow.

The chow began the demanding whimper with the sound of words: What are you waiting for? Let's not waste time. Let's be off!

He crawled to the bed. The pain had lifted, leaving stiffness. Painfully he got to his feet and went to the door of the room. He tossed his head beckoningly, then returned and stood demandingly at the bed. A bare foot slid slowly over the edge of the bed and buried itself in the chow's silky mane. Then suddenly Soft Voice sprang out of bed.

The chow waved his red plume excitedly. Soft Voice was slipping into a warm sweater and skirt and sturdy shoes. Then they were going out the front door and down the driveway together, slowly at first, until in the bright sunlight the chow's stiffness wore off. An then they were headed up Mt. Cheaha, the chow's tail curled tightly on his back, and pacing like a thoroughbred at the track.

Slowly he paced at first, and then faster and faster. And Soft Voice kept pace. The clean spring wind rippled the chow's mane. The wind made music through the sun-silvered poplars along the road. And swiftly

and lightly they skimmed through space together while Soft Voice was saying, "We have the moment — the present. What more does one want?" And they went faster and faster against the wind up the mountain road.

Factory Worker

By Ann Williamson

Gray factory grime,
Slumped shoulders,
Dragging steps,
Home from the shop.

Fall into bed,
Dead tired, exhausted,
Sleep a heavy sleep,
You have no dreams.

You of the factory,
Why plan? Why dream?
Reality is a creeping belt,
Life narrows into one machine.

There is no escape,
No time for life.
Machines don't die,
They live on.

Live on after you
Enslave your child.
Don't rebel, you of the factory,
You can have no dreams!

Paroled

By Betty Jean Foxhall

THE EARLY morning sun crawled up the steps and slid in redness through the door into the dark store. The store was dead except for the smells, and they never died because they couldn't get out. There were no windows and the strong odor of cheese and hog feed rotted with the dank floor boards and their rusty nails. Mr. Hinson and the nigger girl were another part of the smell.

The dirt in Aunt Jane's long dress caught fire in the sunshine as she climbed the steps of the store. Mr. Hinson tilted his cane-bottom chair up against the wall and watched her, his bleached eyes squinting from behind sooty glasses. She grunted and lifted her feet, heavy with men's work shoes, not looking up. Almost hidden under the shadow of a flour sack head-covering, her gray face folded loosely in wrinkles that made her lean jaws sag helplessly. She moved up slowly, her bloodless hand with the skin stretched tightly across the big bones, shaky around the knobbed cane stick on which she leaned.

Mr. Hinson didn't get up.

"Good morning, Jane."

"Morning."

His hands tapped slowly against the bottom round in his chair and he said, "How you this morning?" knowing what the answer would be.

"Gawd, I'm 'bout dead."

Mr. Hinson still didn't get up. He sat and looked hard into the sun, seeing it move away from the top of the pine trees across the road. It had to be this morning. He knew Aunt Jane was going to say it. She looked like that was what she came for, grinning in her gray wrinkles. She said Allen's coming home and he kept watching the sun paint the pine needles, knowing all along that that was what she was going to say.

That and about money. After awhile she'd say it about the money. And he couldn't stop her. He wanted to, but he couldn't. If he could stop her, it would be almost like keeping Allen from coming. Nelda would like that. Nelda moved up behind him close, scared and wanting to put her hands on him and not doing it because Aunt Jane was there.

Nelda had a special smell. It didn't change as other niggers' smells did when the niggers found out Allen was coming home, but stayed clean as earth after a rain. He looked at the sun to stop burning the tree tops and it didn't and he knew that he couldn't do anything about Allen coming home either.

The money and Allen were getting mixed up in Aunt Jane's eyes and watching them was like seeing the devil try to kill and make love at the same time. The deep lines lurking around her bloodless lips were taunting in their wicked omnipotence. Looking at her Mr. Hinson knew that nobody else this side of hell could have mothered and reared a son like her Allen. He was her own, created in her ungodly image, and now she was the braggart mother, triumphantly proclaiming the son's return. Only she didn't want him home, no more than anybody else in Octagon wanted to see him. She was glad because she could send him back again after awhile. And then there was always the money.

Two years he'd been in the pen, and now he was out and couldn't anybody keep him from coming back to Octagon. Everytime he went to the pen, Allen would tell them he'd be back, and he always came back too. Octagon was his home, he said, and Octagon was the place where, when he came back, they had to take him in. They had to take him into the yards, but they still locked the doors at night. They latched the doors and loaded the shotguns and hung them above the doors, and the children lay in their beds and hugged each other close, whispering, "Allen ain't gonna get me."

But Allen always did get somebody. Last time it was Nelda's old man. Old Slade, one of Mr. Hinson's niggers, a tireless servant, his pale, stooped body a slave to the gristmill and cotton fields. They found him on the floor in his cabin one night, the blue, eaten-up face turning purple in the brightness from the fireplace, his girl, Nelda, holding his head on her lap, her hands caressing the bony bruised neck that was dead, and singing in her low voice, not black or white, that strange lullaby understood only by herself and the dead man. Nelda was just a long-legged kid then, but the way she looked at Mr. Hinson there that night in the fire-lit room with the farmers around the murdered nigger wasn't like a kid. After that, Nelda's identity became almost fused with that of the dried-up, bandy-legged little man who seemed to be her God.

If he minded her forever tagging after him, he didn't show it.

At first there was some talk. Here in the blackbelt, Octagon folks didn't take a shine to white men associating with niggers. But the talk never got very loud. Mr. Hinson owned Octagon, with its smelly store, the post office and mail order catalogues, the muddy, gutted roads, the ever-present pine-tree forests, the gray, squatting houses. He had the deeds and mortgages and so they didn't say it out loud what they were thinking. They watched the pale black girl being his little dog, first at a distance, always with that vague uncertainty about her; then, timidly, with big black eyes half a question, catching his hand to walk to the fields, climbing onto his lap when he sat watching the corn meal being ground, coming to live in Phoebe's doll house at the Hinson home, and all the time growing up—growing so that she became a white black girl, still pale but with a brightness under the skin and a body like no other girl around possessed.

They watched and thought their thoughts. It went against their grain, seeing a decent high-class white man taking up with a nigger girl. It wasn't that they thought there was any illicit relationship, nobody believed Mr. Hinson capable of adultery. He was not the man for it. It was rather that the immorality was in the willful violation of white supremacy by one of the sovereign's own members. Had it been adultery they would not have blamed him so. It was the sincere, unpretentious father-daughter-like devotion that got them. They didn't understand it and that which they didn't understand they were suspicious of. Some said that Allen oughta be there. Allen, with his dope and his whiskey, his crazy spells and penitentiary record, his hatred for the nigger. Allen, weak enough to take a pill and strong enough to break a man's neck with his hands, whose only claim to superiority over the black man was in the color of his skin. Yeah, there'd be some changes if Allen were around. He had a sort of philosophy that it was the white man's unquestioned right to sleep with any black man's woman that appealed to him. They'd like to see old Allen around again and see what would happen.

Now he was coming back. Paroled, Aunt Jane said.

The Mirror

By Jeffie Mothershed

AS THE dimming rays of the sun came through the dust-stained curtains, her eyes traveled over the nondescript room, not pausing until they reached the heavy mirror. Then her gaze wandered, returning to the mirror. She walked almost carefully to it and put out her hand feeling the heavy, tarnished gilt frame with its ornate decorations.

The aging mirror itself held her attention. It was so old that it appeared to be veiled with a thin gray mist. While she looked she seemed to see the facial expressions of a young girl, but also herself—her conceits, her fears, her actual thoughts. Soft eyes became haughty. Smooth brows became arched.

She turned away and sat on the bed and looked out the wide window at the withering leaves of the trees, all the while conscious of the eerie light in the room. The sun's reflection on the mirror filled the room with a blue-whiteness that appeared to come from another world.

With sudden impulsiveness she whirled around, once more to face the reflection in the mirror. She knew then that the face in the mirror was not her own but a reflection of someone she had never known before. It was the face of a withered and haggard old woman.

The girl knew she must be dreaming, and she tried to force herself not to look any longer at the face. But some powerful force made her stare as if hypnotized, at the face in the mirror.

Then out of the enormous mysterious thing came a low droning voice that sounded as if it were pleading with her. "Come with me," it said. "I have come to help you, not harm you. Please come."

The girl seemed to sense that she must not touch the mirror or be in the room with it. She fled, terrified, to the window and worked frantically to open it. If she could only open the window, she would be safe. But age had rusted the hinges and the window would not open. She could not leave.

She walked slowly across the room that had once been a very beautiful place. It was now slowly becoming disintegrated with age and lack of care. The only thing that seemed to withstand the age was the mirror.

the hauntingly beautiful mirror that seemed to loom as large as the room itself.

Once more she forced herself to stare at the reflection and once more she saw the face and heard the pleading voice. "Please come. You have nothing to fear. I have come to help you, not harm you. Please come with me. You will like my world. It is so very nice. Just give me your hand."

The girl screamed the horrible scream she had tried so long to force back. Then she was calm. Everything was quiet. The sun no longer played tricks in the room. The leaves on the trees no longer were withered and brown. Everything was serene and lovely. She was no longer afraid of herself or of the reflection in the mirror.

Very quietly she spoke, "Please forgive me. I was afraid of you, but now I'm no longer afraid. I'll go with you."

Very gently a hand came forth from the gigantic mirror and took hold of the beautiful hand of the girl. She stepped forward into the frame saying, "Thank you so much." The voice answered, "I knew you would want to come with me. I'm your destiny and I'll take care of you forever."

The afternoon passed and the night came. Everything was the same as before, except the once lovely girl who now wore the withered face in the hauntingly beautiful mirror.

Mountains of the Mind

By Nell Stone

There are several mountains within
our minds—
We step carefully, we grope and
feel our way along these high
black hills—
Our sight fails us—we cannot see—
There is utter darkness!

Hendrix

By Anna Lukes

HENDRIX was a big man, stooped from his excessive weight. His thick neck folded over his shirt and suit collars; his hair was a thin skirt of grayness that rounded the sides of his head. His face was round and full and chubby like a baby's, only his eyes were intent and probing and his skin light so that the red and blue veins showed through. He had his short, stubby hands humped over his squashed nose.

That letter, he thought, the muscles of his stomach contracting and releasing so that he was almost whimpering to himself. If only he had not written it. His hands loosened from his face and began moving toward his ears and neck. That letter had cost him his son! He slapped his hands back to his face and twisted his brow, mouth and nose into contortions to kill the thoughts and knowledge within him.

For one long moment his eyes were tightly shut behind the palms of his hands and he was content in a world of nothingness. Then he peeked out into life again and down at the letter on his desk. He felt the tears stream down his face and he did not care. He did not care if Mrs. Platt, his ugly little secretary, poked her head through the door into his office and saw him sitting there like a sick laborer.

He cast his eyes across to the other side of the desk where the pictures of his wife, Florence, and his son, Don, stood in a double frame. Florence had given them to him four Christmases ago.

Looking at the pictures he wanted to reach out for a magical power to erase himself from existence so that he could end the anxieties working within his mind and soul. The small, blue-eyed woman in the photo with the short wavy hair would never feel the same kind love toward him, and the smiling blonde-haired youth would never grin at him in that way again.

A car horn blew outside the window and Hendrix suddenly remembered the office. He glanced about the room, scanning the ceiling and the wall as if he were a little boy in a strange place. Everything looked intact. Yet how could it be that everything should look unshaken, peace-

ful, when he was utterly oppressed! beaten! scarred! Somewhere something was wrong, and it seemed impossible that it was all because of his doing or undoing.

Surely the day had begun right. He retraced in his mind the things that had happened since the day began. He could not remember any incidents leading up to the quarrel. He rubbed the palms of his hands together coldly like someone trying to get warmed.

Suddenly he stopped wringing his hands and listened to the groans of his stomach. He had not eaten. He had had nothing since breakfast at eight that morning. . . . and then at ten another cup of coffee.

Frank Woodard with whom he had gone to school through college had gotten to the coffee shop before him. Frank was in the retailing business, a tall, slim man who had held his age much better than Hendrix. But then you never caught good old Frank letting his black hair turn gray about anything.

Hendrix saw Frank nod his head with his coffee cup poised before his mouth.

"Good morning, Hendrix. Join me?"

"Well, I'll have to rush, though."

"Always the busy man. You look extremely happy. Just made a deal or something? Why, that's right!" Frank set his cup down and clicked his fingers. "I read about your son in the morning papers. Congratulations!"

Hendrix issued a loud "Thank you," wondering at the same time if "congratulations!" was all Frank could say. He ordered his coffee and turned back to Frank.

As if sleep-walking, the streaked-blonde went for the coffee, her starched green uniform swaying at the hips as she walked.

"Yes," Hendrix said, "the Junior Chamber of Commerce boys voted Don the outstanding football player of the year. Quite an honor when you think of the competition he had."

The waitress brought the coffee and Hendrix sugared it in three spoons, listening to the tinkle of the spoon against the cup as he stirred the coffee.

"Sure is!" Frank said. "He's to receive the award at the luncheon today, isn't he?"

"Yes. He got up at dawn to work on his talk. Worked on it all day yesterday, too," Hendrix said.

"It means that much to him, I guess," Frank said.

"I gave him a few suggestions. You know, to help him out," Hendrix said.

Frank nodded a little skeptically.

"He was hesitant about using them, though. Maybe it's his age. Most of his friends think they have done everything by themselves too," Hendrix said.

"But you know. It's surprising how good they are at it by themselves," Frank said.

Hendrix looked at Frank puzzled. Sometimes he couldn't understand him. He talked as if a father should leave his son to the destinies. This seemed especially strange to Hendrix for Frank had two sons instead of just one. For Frank to have such an attitude Hendrix didn't see how the two sons could have progressed so well.

He stared down into the black coffee in his cup to hold back the resentment toward Frank's attitude swelling up within his tightened throat. Then he looked out past Frank and got up.

"I better get back to the office," he said. "See you, Frank." He did not add that he wanted to rush back to the office to get his morning work done early enough to be home to see Don off for the luncheon.

He wanted Don to make a good showing at the luncheon. Don was a good scholar as well as an athlete and there was no reason why his acceptance speech couldn't be the best the club had ever heard. It took the right kind of knowing to get it good, and he was afraid Don didn't have that knowing. Don hadn't attended the meetings Hendrix had attended, especially the one at which Hendrix had been honored and he'd given the good talk.

He parked in the front and sliding heavily off the seat, he slammed the car door to, and hurried up the walk and into the house. The half-circle of gray hair had remained unmussed and the colored lines on his face the same brightness.

Today was the cook's day off, he remembered, when he found Florence, his wife, in the kitchen. Florence was a neat, trim woman and the kitchen always appeared clean and uncluttered the whole time she cooked in it.

"Where's Don?" he asked.

"Oh! You're early!" she said, looking up from the tomato she was slicing. For a moment he was not sure she was surprised at his coming home early.

"Don's upstairs reciting his talk," she said. She added quickly when Hendrix started out the kitchen and up the stairs, "He'll be down in a minute."

She picked up the towel on the table, brushed her hands over it, and ran after Hendrix as he started out.

"What's the matter?" he asked, turning around. "You act as if I was going up to harm him or something." He saw that he'd made her nervous, so that she fidgeted with the broach on her dress.

"Don has worked on his speech hard," she said. She pronounced the word 'hard' long and meaningfully. "He is proud it is something he has done alone."

"I helped him, didn't I?" Hendrix said as if it were the most logical thing he'd heard all day.

"Yes. But he didn't use any of your suggestions. He wanted it to be all his own. He told me," Florence said emphatically.

"What are you trying to say? That I waste his time and mine when I help him and he don't want my help?"

"Hendrix, look at Jones and Reynolds and Frank," she pleaded. "You never hear of them telling their sons what to say to people and all these things you tell Don to do! I know you love him and want to help him. . . . "

Hendrix clutched the bannister at the foot of the stairs. "I don't understand you," he said. "Can't a father be proud of his son and help him without you making all kinds of wild accusations?" The harshness of his voice echoed among the walls.

"I'm not making accusations. I'm only. . . . "

"Don always listens to me when you don't interfere," Hendrix shot out.

"Lower your voice. There's no need for shouting. . . . Oh, Don!" she exclaimed, seeing him hurry down the stairs. "Are you ready to leave?"

There was a strain on Don's face as he rushed down the stairs. He

was a tall, muscular young man, the waves in his hair almost camouflaging his similarity to Hendrix. His black polished shoes caught the reflections of his light pressed suit.

"Yes, Mother," he said weakly. At the bottom of the stairs he faced his father and started to speak to him, but Hendrix stopped him, waving his stubby hand, "Here. Let me see your speech."

Don backed away from him, up the first stair step. "Father, I'd rather you didn't," he forced the words out of his mouth.

Hendrix caught his breath and let it jam his nostrils. "What?" he blurted forth. "You'd rather I didn't see your speech? You've never talked like this to me before," Hendrix continued in a voice that cracked. He stared into his son's flushed face, concentrating deeply. "It's that award that has gone into your head!" Hendrix roared.

"Hendrix!" Florence exclaimed.

"Let him say it, Mother. Let him say anything," Don said, turning to her. "But he can't say this time that he got this award for me. He's stood before me and told me that so many times I couldn't forget. That only with his name could I have been on the advertising staff of the Hamilton High, gotten into the Sig fraternity, voted best all-round for the annual. . . . "

"Let me tell you something, young man," Hendrix's face flamed. "You wouldn't be going to that luncheon today if it hadn't been for me."

Don looked at his father with contempt. "Oh, no you don't," he said. "You're not going to tell me that again." He turned around to start up the stairs, but Hendrix pulled at his arm and held him below.

"Come back here!" he shouted, his face streaming with perspiration and his body shaking.

"I want you to know," he began in a preacher-like tone, and waving his finger at Don, "that Chuck Williams would be honored today instead of you if I hadn't written the judges."

The words 'written the judges' ate up the air between the father and son.

"You what?" Don shouted.

"Oh, Hendrix," Florence sighed, sitting down.

The air seemed clear again and Hendrix told himself it had all been

in his mind. "I was doing it for your benefit, young man." His voice was that of the quiet, calm father, he felt, and there was no reason why it shouldn't have been. "Well, don't just stand up there. Let's hear your speech."

Don was breathing hard now, almost gasping for air and in that moment of silence came the long measured blow of a horn out front. Florence was the first to move and resting her hand on Don's coat sleeve as if to guide him to the horn, she said, "There's Cy for you. Go on. Forget about this. Pretend it never happened. Your father didn't write the judges, and if he did, it wasn't what you think it is. Please go on."

"I'm not going," Don asid.

"Hendrix, make him go on."

Hendrix bristled. "Fine son I've raised," he bellowed.

Don stole out, not seeming to want to listen to his father.

Suddenly Hendrix felt everything closing in on him and he muttered, "Aw, hell."

An hour later he was going up to his office through the janitor's entrance of the building. He didn't want to speak to anyone.

He hurried past his secretary and on into his office. He hung his hat on the rack and settled down in his chair, tired because he had not eaten. The afternoon mail was on his desk and he was glad he could read it to keep his mind off his problems at home. He picked up the first envelope. As he tore it open he looked down to see what the next letter was.

But his hands would not reach down to tear up the letter. He had to sit back to think through it all again; he could not make another mistake. He could not say, "Look! This is the letter I sent to the judges. It came back unopened. The stamp must not've stuck. . . . "

He knew whatever he decided would be wrong.

Scene

By Joan Waldrop

The lamp burns low
The rusted moon
Ink-smeared with cloud
Sails ponderous
And slow.

Footsteps
The gleam of the moon
On polished steel
A scream
And creeping quiet.

The lamp is out
The rusted moon
Ink-smeared with cloud
Sails ponderous
And slow.

Daytona Beach

By Betty Joe Benton

They were so tantalizing and sweet—
    those rays
Playing hide and seek with
    the water and the skin
Leaving a mark as they filtered
    through the gates of resistance
Then remaining as reminders of
    What would you say?
Enjoyment? Greed? or just plain
    laziness?

BOOK REVIEW

YOURS TILL DEATH—Civil War Letters of John W. Cotton. Edited by Lucille Griffith. University of Alabama Press, $3.00.

So much material is available on the wealthy planter and the "po white trash" that one might be led to believe that these two classes composed the majority of the South's population in the nineteenth century. Very little has been written about the yeoman farmer—the man who made up the great rank and file of the Southern army during the War Between the States.

Such a man was John Weaver Cotton whose letters to his wife, written between 1862-65, comprise the book, *Yours Till Death*. He represented the class which owned a few slaves and thus sided with the planter in political matters.

Cotton's letters reveal his impressions of the war and his reactions to the situation in which he found himself. Prevalent throughout the letters is his longing to be with his wife and children or out caring for his farm and livestock.

> . . . I would bee very glad to see you and the children I am very well satisfyed concidering the way I left home if I could see you and the children when I wanted to see you. . . . we here down here that wheat is all ruined with the rust if it is I may bee at home in about two weaks but if it is not I dont guess I will. . . .

Towards the end of the war one senses the despondency in his letters as he expresses his anxiousness that "all this unholy mess" might soon be over.

> . . . I here that general wheeler said we would have armistis in less than ten days but I dont no whether he said it or not we here a heap about peace but we dont no whether to believe it or not but I would be glad if it was true nothing would do me more good than anything else for themto make peace for I want to come home very bad for I dont want to spend all of the best of my life here in this cruel and unholy war but I hope to outlive it so I can once more enjoy freedom again. . . .

The army's mail was not censored in those days; therefore, this col-

lection of letters affords an interesting account of troop movements, the strategy of certain generals, and the story of many of the important battles of the war. Much about the problems of daily life is also revealed The prices of food and clothing are constantly mentioned.

> . . . we have been stationed at winchester tennessee but we left there yesterday morning we are now on the march to readysville about 15 miles from nashville there is a big fite expected there in a few days if we have one I expect all of our battalion will bee in it there is some of our men running away and going hom there is fore that went home without leave. . . .
>
> . . . some of our men went to kentuck and some of them has got back and some hant they got into a battle and got cut all to pieces and some killed and some wounded and some taken prisoner but it is not noun how many they are coming in yet it is thought that 4 or 5 of our company is killed but there cant be no correct account given about it yet I found our boys very much dishardened and whiped there is a heap of them ready to give it up . . . there was a colonel here this morning and he said the best of horses wer selling at one hundred and twenty five dollars becon 3 cts per pound corn 30 cts floar 10 dollars a barrel butter 10 cts chees 15 cts coffee 7 and 8 pounds to the dollar whickey 33 cts a gallon good shoes $1.25 cts to 7.00 dollars good boots five dollars. . . .

This unusually valuable compilation of letters was made possible by Miss Lucille Griffith, professor of history at Alabama College in Montevallo, and the University of Alabama Press. The original letters belonged to Mrs. Arah P. Stanley, of Mitchell Dam, Alabama, a great-grand daughter of John W. Cotton. The title is derived from the closing phrase of almost every one of John Cotton's letters to his wife—"your affecionate husband til death."

—*Nancy Masdon*

T7.1-3